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THE INCREASE OF  
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*Reacher*

# THE INCREASE OF TRUE RELIGION

ADDRESSES TO THE CLERGY AND CHURCH  
WORKERS OF THE ARCHDEACONRY OF ELY

*Martha Thompson*

BY

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## NOTE

THESE addresses were delivered to the clergy and lay workers of the Arch-deaconry of Ely, in Little S. Mary's Church, at the conclusion of the National Mission. It seemed worth while to use this occasion for trying to enforce familiar truths, by stating them anew with the object of bringing their practical character into prominence. If we can appreciate the reality of the Spiritual more fully, we may hope to have the sense of patriotic duty strengthened, and thus to be better able to do our personal part in the regeneration of national life.

W. C.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*February, 1917.*



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## I. HUMAN POWER OF KNOWING TRUTH

I. The petition, *Increase in us true Religion*, from the collect for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity, not only sets the key-note of the recent effort to call us to repent from national forgetfulness of God and indifference to Him, but also serves to mark out the nature and character of our task in trying to engage with fresh activity in Our Master's service. Since the harvest is great and the labourers are few, it is important that our endeavours should be well directed, and aimed at that which is essential; it seems worth while for us to think for a little about true religion and what it really is. The spiritual life, as Scupoli says, "consists in nothing else but the knowledge of the goodness and the greatness of God, and of our nothingness and inclination to all evil<sup>1</sup>." There are so many things which are associated with religion, as helps to religion or

<sup>1</sup> Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, p. 4.

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as the results of religion, that we are in danger of identifying it with one or other of the things with which it is associated, instead of concentrating attention on religion itself.

The confusion is very common, and there is much to excuse it. S. James points to kindly action and purity of life as the signs of true religion—as things that can spring from no other root; but in our age and in our country this is no longer the case; humanitarianism and self-discipline are admired and cultivated by many to whom religion makes little appeal, since they are not conscious of it as a power in their own lives. Philanthropy has been much in evidence in recent years, and it is right that stress should be laid upon it; any professedly religious man who neglects it altogether seems to show that his religion is vain. The stirring of this sense of duty should be a result of religion, but it is not the root of the matter.

So too of the aids to religion. There are men to whom the musical expression of praise appeals very strongly, and who, since they feel that it rouses devout feeling as nothing else can do, devote great care to the cultivation of sacred music; but, however closely sacred music may be associated with Christian worship, it is not to be identified with religion; the improvement of sacred art of any kind is not necessarily the

increase of true religion. When there is so much need to concentrate our efforts on the increase of religion itself, in its essence and power, there is a waste of effort in giving too much attention to the accompaniments and results of religion. Those who complain that Christianity has proved a failure, and who are disappointed that the recent Mission has not been more fruitful, may surely ask themselves whether they have not been relying on external influences by which they have been distracted from dependence on spiritual power alone.

At the Reformation when the collects were translated, Cranmer added the epithet true to the word religion. All the great controversies of the day, political and other, were about religion; much that had the firmest hold upon popular feeling was denounced as superstitious; strange opinions of many kinds were in the air, and there were fanatics who seemed ready to upset the fabric of society in the name of religion. Since religion might be thus associated with what was superstitious or mischievous, Cranmer felt that there was need to safeguard the expression in a form of Common Prayer, and to ask for the increase of true religion which must be a blessing to each Christian man, and to the whole community; but the epithet reminds us that since that time there has been the greatest difficulty

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in coming to any agreement as to the test of truth.

2. S. Thomas Aquinas insisted, as against the sceptics of his day<sup>1</sup>, that the intellect is personal and individual, and that there is no necessary inconsistency between philosophy and the faith<sup>2</sup>. While we hold that there is absolute truth in the Divine Mind, we may recognise differences owing to human limitations, in the degree and in the manner in which we apprehend it. There are different realms of knowledge; and since we cannot really sever our minds into compartments that are absolutely distinct, we should perhaps speak of distinct elements in knowing rather than of different kinds of knowledge; but we all recognise that there is, on the one hand, the knowledge of the outer world and of other people, which reaches us through our senses; and that besides there is immediate knowledge, as it is sometimes called, of our own states of mind—our thoughts and feelings. The one is the realm of Natural Science where knowledge is accumulated by observation of the external world, and built up steadily bit by bit; while religion is primarily concerned with the inner life—with the heart as well as the mind,

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *Averroes*, 107, 192.

<sup>2</sup> *De unitate intellectus, contra Averroistas in Opera* (1787), XIX. 252.



with desires and feelings as well as convictions. These aspects of knowledge cannot be separated by any hard and fast line<sup>1</sup>; they are closely inter-connected, but we are apt to fall into error if we pursue either of them exclusively and disregard the other, or if we confuse them together.

3. In the time of S. Thomas Aquinas there was a tendency to treat religion as supreme, as giving the standpoint from which the world should always be viewed; empirical knowledge was regarded as quite subordinate, and was treated in terms of a philosophy that was consonant with religious thought. On this account little progress was made during the Middle Ages in the knowledge of the world around us. There was much careful observation of the stars in the casting of nativities; the planets were thought of as the agents by which God controlled the destinies of man, and astrologers tried to detect the forces which were at work in each human life. There was much examination of plants and their properties, with the view of detecting the signatures with which God had marked them, so that men might learn what practical human needs

<sup>1</sup> Harnack appears to regard the sphere of religion as personal and subjective, and completely separate from history and science, which deal with external evidence. *What is Christianity?*, 27.

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they were divinely intended to subserve. But the attempt to interpret the details of Astronomy and Botany by the direct light of religion proved unfruitful and misleading. It led to a disparagement of the method of study which has given us an accurate knowledge of some natural forces, and has thus increased our power over Nature. This characteristic defect of medieval thinking has almost entirely passed away in modern times; though there is sometimes a suspicion of its recurrence, and Bergson has been charged with an "exaggerated subjectivism<sup>1</sup>" in treating our knowledge of the world around us.

4. Our temptation in the present day is the opposite one of attaching undue importance to knowledge that comes from without. The advance in our knowledge of the world around us, during the last three centuries, has been extraordinary; and with it there has been unprecedented progress in industrial power and the development of the resources of the world. We are inclined to take human experience of the world around us, as the only type of knowledge that is worth having; and we endeavour to employ scientific ways of thinking, and to bring

<sup>1</sup> T. J. Gerrard, *Bergson*, 33. A similar objection is raised from a very different standpoint by Elliott, *Modern Science and the Illusions of Prof. Bergson*, 52.

religious truth into line with the intellectual habits of the day. This standpoint was adopted at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century by the English Deists, and it lies at the root of the great development of scientific theology in Germany in modern times<sup>1</sup>. But I venture to think that this whole habit of thought is defective. Just as the religious aspect was over accentuated in the Middle Ages, and was inappropriate to the pursuit of empirical science, so the phraseology of the Deists and their successors appears to be inadequate to express religious truth. Religion is the conscious relationship between a human person and a personal God; intellectual abstractions do not convey all that is contained in spiritual realities.

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(a) If we start from our knowledge of things around us and go back and back, we get to the notion of a Great First Cause, as an ultimate explanation; God is thought of as infinitely removed from man, but this does not help us to realise the fulness of the Divine Life. There is a false spirituality in setting the intellect to work to frame conceptions of the power of a God, who is infinitely above us, instead of dwelling on the character of the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

<sup>1</sup> Tholuck, *Vermischte Schriften*, II. 23—32; Semler, *Lebensbeschreibung*, I. 211, 282.

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(b) Similarly, man's ordinary attitude of mind towards the world about him is that of a looker on; he can isolate and concentrate his attention, and analyse the phenomena presented to him. The great physical forces, of which we feel the effects, are beyond our control; and in any branch of scientific enquiry, personal temperament and idiosyncracies are, so far as possible, to be laid aside; we try to reach principles that are common to all alike. The pursuit of scientific knowledge is impersonal; it may give the opportunity for developing particular skill of mind or body, but it has little bearing on the man as a whole, his personality and character<sup>1</sup>. And so it cannot give the best basis for describing and discussing religious experience, which is intensely personal. This is exemplified by S. Paul when he cried, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?...I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind*. The Deist cannot, from his point of view, really grasp spiritual realities; his conception of a Great First Cause is but a poor shadow of the God whom we worship, and he thinks of man as a mere looker on, not as taking a personal part, and having personal experience. Religion has to do with the relation between God and Man; and Deism does not give us a stand-

<sup>1</sup> Lotze, *Microcosmus* (English Translation), I. 156.

point from which the relations between the Supreme Being and the man personally can be adequately discussed. "The highest conceptions of God seem to approximate to one of two types, which, without prejudice, and merely for convenience, I may respectively call the religious and the metaphysical. The metaphysical conception emphasises His all-inclusive unity. The religious type emphasises His ethical personality. The metaphysical type tends to regard Him as the logical glue which holds multiplicity together and makes it intelligible. The religious type willingly turns away from such speculations about the Absolute, to love and worship a Spirit among spirits<sup>1</sup>." A sense of personal obligation is involved in the practice of religion—obligation to acknowledge God and obligation to obey Him; and those who are absorbed in the observation and analysis of external conditions, have no terms by which to account for the genesis of this sense of personal obligation.

True Religion is primarily concerned with the world within; and if we are to think of it clearly and promote its activity, we must use appropriate terms, and not look at it in the same way as we do upon the world without. Religion must be for us not merely a group of things that men did, or the opinions they cherished, in the past;

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, 19.

but something living, that we know to be living because we have felt its power.

5. Perhaps we may most easily discriminate between the knowledge of the world without and of the world within, when we think of the aims for which they are respectively pursued. Knowledge of the world without is pursued for the sake of accumulating information and getting power over other things and other men; it results in knowing more things. But the object of the cultivation of religion lies within; in a change in the character of the man himself, and his personal habits of thought and speech and action. Such a change is not brought about by acquiring fresh information but by association with the best we know. "The secret of goodness and greatness is in choosing whom you will approach and live with, in memory or imagination, through the crowding obvious people that seem to live with you<sup>1</sup>." The Christian religion tells us not merely of a Great First Cause, but of a Heavenly Father, who has provided for our deepest needs through His Son by the Spirit, and with whom we may have intercourse. In communion with God we may become more like Him, and learn to look at things with His eyes, so as to have a sense of proportion, undistracted by passion and tempera-

<sup>1</sup> Browning, *Letters*, II. 318.

ment, a persistency in going on with the best we know, and such insight to understand others, that we may be able to enter into their point of view and make allowance for their limitations. It is thus that we may, not merely accumulate a knowledge of things, but cultivate our own power of knowing aright.

For the increase of true religion we must look both at the world without, and at experience within. The experience of the holy men of old has been recorded for us in books, and their doings have been set before us in histories; we dare not neglect these aids to religion. They tell us what has been known in the past of God and His relations with Man. But we shall appreciate the recorded religious experience of the past most truly, if we look at it, not with the detached observation of the scientific on-looker, but from the standpoint of religious experience in the present day, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and thus cultivating a greater power of knowing the best that can be known.

## II. RELIGIOUS CONVICTION

I. There is a natural tendency to regard what goes on in the world around us as real, since it persists after our little lives are over, and to treat the world within as fanciful and arbitrary, perhaps illusory. But on more careful examination we may perceive, as Descartes did long ago, that the fullest certainty to which we can attain is that of the existence of a self-conscious intelligence, a fact that is given by inner experience, *Cogito ergo sum*. From this starting point philosophy has, for the last three hundred years, investigated the possibilities of knowing; but after all, there are other sides of human nature that ought to be taken into account. Man is self-conscious, and he is Will, as well as Intelligence. There are many who, like Goethe, pride themselves, not on the power of knowing which they share with all the world, but on the capacity of feeling which is personal to themselves; they concern themselves chiefly with their own self-development. Others, in this practical age, are taken up with what they can do, and have little interest in the theory of knowledge. Thus the



study of Will and Purpose has come to be very prominent in recent years, both in the Voluntarism of France, and the Pragmatism which has had great popularity in America, and has roused such interesting controversy in this country. Pragmatism can certainly claim to be an instructive supplement to the intellectual theory of knowledge, even if it is not accepted as a substitute<sup>1</sup>. The consciousness of myself as willing, brings into clearer light the not-self which is involved in every act of self-consciousness<sup>2</sup>. We are aware at times that our exercise of will is favoured by circumstances, as when the skater feels the wind behind him, and is carried along; or on the other hand we may feel that things are against us, and that the exercise of our will is limited and opposed by things we cannot control. In primitive times and heathen countries, men think of the world around them as capricious and hostile, arbitrary and antagonistic, and of the powers that rule it as beings that must be propitiated one by one. But a better understanding of the world lends itself to a different religious attitude; those who think of the world as governed by one Ruler, are on the plane of thought on which religious experi-

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, those who accept pragmatism as a doctrine of truth, under mundane conditions, may desire a better rational basis for their belief in continued existence apart from mundane conditions.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ward, *Realm of Ends*, 237.

ence becomes possible, since they may become conscious of their relationship to Him. Religious conviction—the sense of personal relationship to God—may be awakened by any trivial incident which makes men feel that they are themselves in opposition to His rule and His Will; or on the other hand they may enjoy the sense of being personally in harmony with the Power that rules the world. Such a conviction possesses the highest degree of certainty; it cannot be affected by argument; while the thoughts about God which depend on the experience of others<sup>1</sup> have no such certainty.

*(Conviction)* 2. The sense of sin is the most common of all religious convictions: sin is felt as an oppressive burden by men of diverse creeds, and we have abundant evidence of the difficulty of expressing this conviction. The feeling of coming into close relationship with the absolutely good is overwhelming; not everyone, perhaps not any one, has the power of thinking out fully what it means, or the power of putting it into words. The language of such a man as John Bunyan seems to be exaggerated; but he himself would have regarded it as inadequate, and a feeble attempt to find words to describe what he himself had felt. This conviction of sin and of the need of forgiveness

<sup>1</sup> S. John iv. 42.

is an experience that is common to multitudes of men; there is a ground of sympathy between all who have felt this conviction; but differences of circumstances and temperament will affect the mode in which they each endeavour to say what they have experienced. The most admirable expressions of the sense of sin are to be found in the penitential Psalms, and they appeal to devout men in every age. The precise mode of expression adopted, the phraseology and the imagery used, are well worthy of careful investigation, because we can read through them to a personal experience, which is more or less appropriately indicated but can never be fully uttered. Minute examination of the time and circumstances and language, in which a religious conviction is expressed, amply repays us, if it gives us a clearer understanding of the person, and of the experience he endeavoured to describe.

It is in the Psalms too that we find the classic expression of that other experience, the sense of restored harmony with the Universe and its Ruler—the assurance of forgiveness—the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord doth not impute his sin. The sense of pardon is an experience which each and all of the saints of God have enjoyed; they have had similar spiritual experience, though the modes of expressing it, depending as they do on differences of intel-

lectual power and of temperament, may be very dissimilar.

In these religious convictions—the sense of sin and the assurance of forgiveness—however they are expressed, certain intellectual beliefs are involved. These convictions imply a theistic belief in a Ruler to whom men are under obligations, and in the keeping of whose Law they have failed; and a reliance on His character and goodness is also involved. *He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.* One name stands out as typical of the men who have believed in the trustworthiness of God. *Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto Him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God.* However mysterious the incidents which gave rise to this conviction may seem, we at least feel that Abraham is set before us in the Old Testament as a man who was fully convinced that he might rely upon God, as a keeper of Covenants,—not merely as one who would favour him in his own life, but as one who could be trusted through all generations.

3. Another form of religious conviction is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament from the time of Moses onwards. Closely associated with the belief that the world is governed by One God, and that His purpose is being slowly realised,

is the belief that He uses men as His instruments, conscious or unconscious, for carrying out that purpose. We see how with Moses at the Burning Bush, and with one after another of the prophets, the awakening to the conviction that they were themselves called to be the instruments of God, was the great crisis of their lives. To think that God uses men as His instruments may be quite uninspiring; but the man, who awakens to the conviction that he is himself called to be God's instrument, becomes conscious of a great trust confided to him, and of his personal inability to fulfil that task. This sense of the greatness of the vocation comes out in the reluctance with which Moses set out on the work of delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt. We may also gather it from the picture we have of David as the shepherd whose business it was to care for God's people: this was the trust that was laid upon him by God, the task for which he was trained. In the story of Solomon we see how much the sense of responsibility to God in the discharge of his royal duties weighed upon the child who succeeded to the Kingship.

This sense of vocation seems first of all to have been recognised, as we gather from the Bible story, in connection with what we should call political changes,—the migration of Israel from Egypt and the establishment of an independent

political community. Besides the founders of the Jewish nation, men arose from time to time to intervene in the affairs of the community with a special message from God. The sense of vocation was a wonderful experience that came to each of the prophets and marked them out from other folk. There were many men who had religious thoughts but who were without sense of vocation. In *Ecclesiasticus* there is a great deal of beautiful and exalted thought about God, but the writer was regarded as a mere compiler and imitator though also "as a man of great diligence among the Hebrews who did not only gather the grave and short sentences of wise men that had been before him, but himself also uttered some of his own, full of much understanding and wisdom<sup>1</sup>." Nor did the editor claim for himself that he had any special message to give; he does not claim to have had the religious experience of an Amos, or an Isaiah or an Ezekiel, and to be convinced of a personal vocation as the Messenger of God.

4. It is the glory of Christianity, as distinguished from all other religions however noble, that it has rendered this conviction of vocation—this consciousness of being trusted by God as His instrument—attainable by all mankind. The conviction of being a chosen instrument of God

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiasticus*, Prologue.

was very exceptional under the old dispensation ; few could aspire to it. For the ordinary Israelite it was enough to play his part among a divinely chosen people, and to conform to the Law which God had given for that people. The Israelites had little consciousness of any relationship to God apart from the nation, or any personal and habitual obligations to God beyond those laid down for the people ; but Christianity called all men to the personal religious experience of the remission of sins and the personal obligation to give effect to the purpose of God. At the day of Pentecost, the aspiration of the prophet Joel was realised. *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.* The revelation which our Lord gave of the Fatherhood of God, and of His care for each one of His family, made it possible for each and all to be conscious of a vocation to fulfil God's Will in his place in the world, and to be the instrument of giving effect to His purpose.

5. Religious conviction is often imperfectly expressed ; and it also involves intellectual elements which have no immunity from error ; the mere fact that there has been progress in the knowledge of God, implies that there has been misconception and error in the past ; at the times of this ignorance God winked ; and there are limits to any spiritual insight now. A man may

mistake God's purpose, and mistake the means by which it is to be attained; he may be wrong about the task assigned him. Even though he has a strong belief as to his religious duty, he may be in error, like Saul when he went forth to Damascus to persecute. But even so, it is commonly and rightly felt nowadays that religious conviction is a thing to be respected, even when it seems to be mistaken and mischievous. The religious man claims to hold by the truth of God; it is possible that his claim may prove well founded, mistaken though it seems. Gamaliel expressed what has come to be the popular feeling on the subject. He regarded the Apostles as dangerous fanatics; he thought they were men who were mistaken and leading others astray: he feared that their teaching would encourage disaffection to the Roman rule, and yet he insisted that this mistaken conviction should be respected. Had they merely insisted on following their own judgment, and backed it up by an assertion of opinions, there would have been no reason for allowing them to defy a human tribunal; but they claimed to have a message from God. Since there was no definite test which could be applied there and then, to distinguish true and false prophets<sup>1</sup>, they might conceivably be justified. *Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this*

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xviii. 21, 22.



*counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found to fight against God.* There does not appear to have been any element of self-assertion in the Apostles' attitude; there was no self-assertion towards God, for they were eager to deliver His message in spite of all the dangers they might incur: there was no self-assertion against human authority, for they were ready to submit to any hardships or shame they might incur in doing their duty; and they made no attempt to resist or to disparage civil authority, as fanatics like Theudas had done. Their conduct was governed throughout by a sense of duty to God and duty to man; and this marks them out from some of the Conscientious Objectors of the present day who seem to glory in the vehemence of their self-assertion: a strong personal opinion, which is not coupled with a sense of duty to God, has not a claim to the respect which was accorded to the Apostles. Those who defy the demands of the society in which they live are hardly justified in expecting that continued protection of life and property shall be afforded them, and those who attempt to justify such conduct are in danger of being taken for mere anarchists.

### III. THE SECRET OF HUMAN PROGRESS

I. The religious convictions of the Christian man have the highest degree of certainty *for him*; he is sure that he has sinned, and sure too of the reality of God's forgiving Love; he has also a sense of obligation to live up to his divine vocation. But yet he cannot claim any personal immunity from misconception and error. What reason has he for thinking that what is to *him* a matter of certainty is really true? The most complete confirmation of the truth of his conviction is given him when he finds that it holds good when he acts upon it<sup>1</sup>, and that similar beliefs appeal to other minds with the same intensity; but those, who recognise the reality of the spiritual, can see some confirmation of their belief, in the traces of its power which they find in every department of human affairs.

It is important that we should bear in mind the precise cogency of arguments in regard to the spiritual which are drawn from external conditions

<sup>1</sup> S. John vii. 17.

and secular affairs. We cannot by searching find out God; spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. There can be no demonstration, from our knowledge of the external world, of the existence of God, or the immortality of the soul: external observation and experiment do not afford a foundation on which knowledge of the spiritual can be built. But though external observations do not *demonstrate* any proposition about the spiritual and eternal, we may find in them *confirmation* of what we know from personal conviction. The apologists of the eighteenth century argued from the truths of *natural* religion to the credibility of *revealed* religion; but it can no longer be assumed that natural religion is universally accepted by thinking men. We shall find ourselves in closer accord with apostolic usage, and with Scripture, if we take our stand on the certainty of religious conviction, and look merely for confirmation to the external world and the course of secular affairs. We may trace contributions which seem to have been made by religion,—that is by the human consciousness of relations with God—towards the progress of mankind, both intellectually, in helping us to understand what is otherwise unintelligible, and morally in the improvement of the relations of men with one another. On behalf of religion it may be claimed, with much probability, that it has initiated, and

inspired human progress; and at all events it renders intelligible what would be inexplicable if human beings were wholly controlled by external forces and human society were a mere mechanism.

2. The conviction of sin and the sense of forgiveness imply a belief in the *trustworthiness of God* such as is ascribed to Abraham: the belief in Him as the keeper of His Covenant underlies the whole worship and the code of the Old Testament; and it was the reiterated complaint of the prophets that the people had failed miserably in keeping their own side of the Covenant while God had been true to His. This belief in the reliability of God has at all events a counterpart in the principle of the uniformity of nature, which is the fundamental assumption of all empirical science. Without this necessary assumption systematic experiment would be futile; and the acceptance of this principle has been the greatest possible help to the co-ordination of our observations and the interpretation of nature. But if the religious belief is left out of account, it is very difficult to see whence this principle can have been derived; it is by no means axiomatic<sup>1</sup> and it could hardly arise from mere observation, as it seems quite inconsistent with human experience of the variableness of nature, especially of tropical nature.

<sup>1</sup> J. Ward, *Realm of Ends*, 12.

Monotheism and the belief in the uniformity of nature are closely associated; and it is at least possible that the religious belief was anterior to the scientific principle, and that the whole body of empirical science is a confirmation in the sphere of external experience, of the validity of what was originally a theological belief. At any rate the consonance of a theological belief with a fundamental axiom of empirical science goes to show that we are not justified in separating our knowledge of the spiritual and of the secular absolutely, as if they were entirely distinct and had nothing to do with one another, but that these departments of knowledge are closely interconnected, and interact.

3. Something similar may be felt in regard to human morality: there has been progress from the purely savage state: there is more security for individual life and property, and co-operation for social objects. But it is difficult to see how this could have arisen or been encouraged: it is not easy to account for the conjunction of self-sacrifice and self-development in the moral aim<sup>1</sup>, or to explain the sense of obligation, which is an element in the doing of duty. The controlling and the transforming of the primitive motives are inexplicable. The difficulty disappears if we recognise how

<sup>1</sup> D'Arcy, *God and Freedom*, 215.

widespread has been the belief in a divine purpose, and the conviction of an obligation to fulfil it. This belief gives the means of distinguishing between right and wrong, both in the world at large, and in individual lives; and not only does it give an intellectual means of discrimination, it provides a motive power. If we believe that God has a purpose for the world at large, then each nation has a mission—like Israel of old—to maintain the knowledge of God in the world, and to exercise national influence and power as a trust from Him. The same religious principle that can be appealed to, in regard to great communities and their relations to one another, also applies to the personal life and to individual conduct. The religious recognition of God's purpose renders the sense of obligation and the progress of morality intelligible; we are not forced to try and derive them from the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. The close connection between the spiritual and the secular, and the importance of the spiritual as rendering progress in the secular sphere intelligible, perhaps in rendering it possible, is thus confirmed from another side.

4. The origin of the sense of beauty and of canons of taste is also mysterious<sup>1</sup>, but it seems that religion is capable of calling forth and stimu-

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, 59.

lating artistic activities. The religious mind desires to pay homage to the Ruler of All, to offer the richest and best he can in token of homage; the desire to render a worthy offering is a constant stimulus to the craftsman. There is a religious side to the appreciation of beauty; *and Religion* Ruskin has described the artistic impulse as the expression of man's delight in God's work; and much of the wealth and the skill that have been spent on building temples, or on statuary or pictorial art, has had a religious aim. The desire to offer the best to God is an outcome of religious devotion; it has helped to redeem human craftsmanship from a mechanical character, and to give fresh inspiration from age to age.

There is no side of human activity which is alien to religion, and religious belief accounts for the fundamental assumptions which give a basis for the progress of knowledge; it accounts for an improving standard of conduct and for the growth of skill and taste. Just because this principle is spiritual, it does not merely serve to analyse the progress which has been made in the past: there is no finality about it, and it gives us the hope of an indefinite progress which need never come to an end. The spiritual has been externalised, and has shown its influence in things around us: we cannot regard religious conviction as merely a matter of our own personal certainty, when its

power and influence are confirmed in the institutions of the highest races and the progress of mankind.

After all, it is in the increased diffusion and intensity of spiritual power in the world, that we have the fullest confirmation of the truth of religious convictions in the world within. The conception of saintliness, and of the means for obtaining it have altered; we no longer think of it as necessarily requiring the withdrawal from secular affairs, or look for it in moments of devout contemplation, but as the constant hallowing of the whole life in all its activities and under any circumstances. It is also noticeable that religion has grown as a power in the world with the growth of society. The faith of Abraham was manifested by occasional incidents, and self-forgetful sacrifice; but the ideals of Christianity are accepted as furnishing worthy conceptions for human conduct in all the relations of our complicated social system. There are few who believe that they have got beyond Christian ideals or repudiate them altogether, and they win intellectual approval from multitudes who make little attempt to put them in practice.

5. Spiritual experience and influence have been recorded in literature and in history. We have the records of personal religious experience



in the psalms and prophets and in all devout literature; but this cannot be interpreted hastily; there is need of insight to discern its full import. What Harnack said of Our Lord's spiritual experience is true in degree of others who have been charged with a divine revelation. "No one could fathom this mystery who had not had a parallel experience<sup>1</sup>." Those who have never had religious experience of their own, can hardly hope, with the help of a dictionary and a grammar, to appreciate the religious experience of others. But even without comprehending it fully we can note its effectiveness. Incidents, as recorded in Hebrews xi. and in the history of every age, will help us to see the power of religious conviction as determining human action and moulding human society. And these phenomena, like other phenomena, become the subject of study: we can bring our intelligence to bear upon them, and analyse, and discuss, and interpret. We find in them material for thoughts about God, and about God's relation to Man; we can get clear statements as to the religious experience of the past, and draw out what it implies and means. Thoughts about God can never have the vividness of personal experience; but in so far as they stimulate the attempt to live more closely in accord with God's will, they are to be cherished.

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 129.

## 30 *The Secret of Human Progress*

It is indeed true that a survey of religious beliefs in the past is too often apt to be depressing; to recall to us superstitions which we have outgrown, and practices which we condemn as immoral. "The reflective student of the history of human knowledge is apt to receive an overwhelming impression of the instability of opinion, of the mutability of beliefs, of the vicissitudes of science, in short of the impermanence of what is, or passes for, truth<sup>1</sup>." But this need not disconcert us when we realise that the process of growth implies the discarding of what has served its purpose. As Dr Schiller excellently says, "There is not the slightest reason why the steady flow of the stream of 'truths' that pass away should fill us with dismay. That a 'truth' should turn out 'false' is a calamity only if we are unable to supplant it by a 'truer.'...We are enabled to declare an old 'truth' 'false' because we are able to find a new one which more than fills its place. We do not discard a valuable and serviceable conception until we have something more valuable and convenient ...to serve us in its stead<sup>2</sup>." We may always hope for better guidance in our efforts to draw nigh to God and to give effect to His will. This progress is exemplified in religious, as well as in other knowledge; in expressing religious experi-

<sup>1</sup> F. C. S. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 211.

ence and formulating religious opinions, men must make use of the intellectual habits and current phraseology of their own time; they can never escape the temporary altogether, or take account by anticipation of the experience of coming generations. That which we have outlived was a power in its own time, and endured as an inspiring influence for a longer or shorter period. S. Augustine's vision of a City of God dominated Christian thought for fourteen hundred years<sup>1</sup>; while on the other hand S. Bernard's plea for consecrated warfare did little either to extend the limits or invigorate the life of Christendom. The ideal which S. Francis cherished did not obtain such a hold upon the order he founded as to be an abiding spiritual influence. These were inspiring efforts for a time, but not for all time: it is the unique personality of our Lord Jesus Christ which has a regenerating power that is as potent in all lands and for all ages as it was at first in Galilee.

The formulating and discussing the thoughts about God which are implied in Christian experience, have the highest importance, in order that the full inspiring force, the full guidance which they afford may be preserved<sup>2</sup>; but such study

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, *Christianity and Politics*, 65.

<sup>2</sup> The importance of the Arian controversy, with all its subtleties, is seen when we realise its result in preserving the effectiveness of Christianity as an ethical influence. Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, II. 112.

is at best only a preliminary to the increase of true religion. We can see the distinction if we recall what was happening in England two centuries ago. The discussion of religious problems, the official presentation of religious truth had been pursued with great assiduity: the preachers who dealt with these topics had large congregations; Stillingfleet and Tillotson and Barrow were intellectual leaders, and Christianity was in possession. Yet this academic Christianity seemed hardly to touch life, and to have little influence on religion. It was from the preaching of John Wesley that the great religious movement of the eighteenth century started. To those who were satisfied with the official presentation of Christianity, this movement seemed unnecessary, while the vagaries associated with it were repellent to the sober minded; and yet it revolutionised the religious condition of English-speaking peoples. Wesley insisted that religion was not to be merely the acceptance of Christian doctrines as formulated by others, but the outcome of personal experience. He was not concerned with the formulating of Christian truth, he busied himself about the intensity with which it was held. He felt that the Love of God should not only be accepted at secondhand as true for all the world, but known as a personal conviction by those who had tasted for themselves that God is good.

This is the aim we should set before us in endeavouring to promote the increase of true religion to-day. There has been abundance of the official presentation of Christian truth, but there is need that men should not only accept it, but feel its power themselves; and a ministry which fails to try and meet this need is in danger of failing to promote God's work in the world.

## IV. THE ATTRACTIVE POWER OF PERSONALITY

1. There are close analogies between the growth of animal life, and the development of spiritual life; and just as it is said that the individual goes through stages of development that correspond to those which can be distinguished in the progress of the species as a whole, so is it true that the spiritual life of the Christian man reproduces the main stages in the development of religious life in the world. The recognition of the Divine horror of sin which was set forth at Sinai, ought to have a place in the personal religious life of the Christian man; but after all there is a contrast between the two dispensations<sup>1</sup>. The great feature which distinguished the gospel as first preached from contemporary religions was its attractive power. *I if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.* The Old Dispensation had been chiefly concerned with prohibitions and the penalties that enforced them; it told of the thunderings of Sinai, and appealed to the fear of punishment as the chief means of

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 18.

securing the national religion. This element still survives among us; to prohibit what is evil, or what tends to evil, and to appeal to the fear of punishment is the best the State can do<sup>1</sup>. But Christianity has a far more effective weapon in her armoury; she won her way at first by presenting the express image of the Divine to men, and relying on this attractive power. The gospel sets before us the conception of perfect good—of a perfectly good Will; and Christianity seeks to make this Will prevail and to realise God's purpose. This can only be accomplished by the attractive power which the love of the good exercises on human hearts, so that human wills may be moulded more and more after the likeness of the Divine Will: it may thus produce not merely an external conformity, which is all that the fear of punishment can accomplish, but hearty co-operation in striving to attain that which is best.

Christ relied on this attractive power as none of the great religious teachers of Israel had done before; and S. Paul was carefully on his guard lest any triviality of habit or temperament should offend his hearers so that they should not feel the attractive power of the message he had to give. He would not be dependent on his hearers for bodily sustenance, lest he should hinder the gospel

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, *British Citizens and their responsibility to God*, 37.

## 36 *Attractive Power of Personality*

of Christ. To the Jews he became as a Jew that he might gain the Jews, and to the weak became he as weak that he might gain the weak. *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.*

2. S. Paul insists again and again that he could do nothing by himself, but that the blessing of God's Spirit was essential if there were to be any result of all his labours; and this is as true to-day as it was long ago. The appeal of God's Love seeks for a personal response; there must be a change in the man himself, his habits of thought, and feeling, and willing; and no human effort can ensure that the gospel message shall take hold of the heart and quicken men to yield themselves to its influence. Human gifts and eloquence can indeed rouse curiosity and interest: there are many men who are interested in all that concerns humanity, who wish to know about the habits of theological thought which prevailed in bygone days, and the noblest hopes which men have cherished for themselves; but the gospel message misses its mark, if it only provides intellectual satisfaction or artistic pleasure *as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument.* It is only through God's blessing that the word spoken by



human lips has power to attract. This essential condition must be borne in mind when we are considering how the ministers and stewards of God's Mysteries may best discharge their responsibility for the cure of the souls committed to them, and endeavour to make the attractive power of Christ's gospel felt.

3. Plainly it is their first duty to provide the opportunities in which Christ will make the attractive power of His personality felt through the means which He Himself has instituted. "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.*"... "*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*" He has ordained a perpetual memorial of His precious death that we might offer our humble and hearty thanks to Almighty God, "for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, both God and Man; who did humble Himself, even to the death upon the Cross, for us, miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death; that He might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life. And to the end that we should alway remember the exceeding great love of our Master, and only Saviour, Jesus Christ, thus dying for us, . . . He hath instituted and ordained holy mysteries, as pledges of His love, and for a continual remembrance of His

death." He gives us the opportunity of offering ourselves, our souls and bodies to God, in union with His own sacrifice of Himself, and of entering into closest communion with Him in His thoughts and desires, at the supreme moment of His earthly life.

4. The Love of God and its attractive power are also displayed, though less clearly, in the records of those who have felt its influence powerfully in the past. From their experience, as recorded in the Bible, we can gather what God has done, and since He is eternally the same, what He can and will do, for us and in us. The steward of the heavenly Mysteries can draw from the treasure committed to him things both new and old; but he has need of discretion to lay stress on that which best sets forth the attractive power of the Love of God. The Bible is a record of God's dealings with mankind: much of it tells of the discipline He exercised on the nation, and of the fear He inspired that He might mould the people of Israel to be His witness in the world. But the books of the Old Testament do not now appeal to us personally most strongly as the history of a nation in a distant past, but as a gallery of portraits which set God before us as a living power, calling men to be His conscious instruments in the training of the world. "The history which

concerns us is the history of self-conscious personalities, and of communities which are (in a sense) self-conscious also<sup>1</sup>." The more we can penetrate through the writings which have come down to us, to the spiritual experience and personal character of the men whose utterances are recorded, the more shall we find something to which we can personally respond. Those who have a real appreciation of the spiritual have insight to discern what may be discarded without loss. Much of the Old Testament is taken up with accounts of the occasions which called forth the utterances of the prophets, and the appreciation they received: but that has ceased to be a matter of living interest to many of us, for it has little abiding influence on our own lives. The credentials which Moses offered to Pharaoh of his claim to speak in God's name were of supreme importance at the time, but they do not greatly concern us now; and even in the Epistles we find much that has little value for us. The apostolic injunctions as to meats offered to idols tell of a time of transition in heathen lands, but they have little direct teaching for us in the present day. The more the Christian minister can concentrate attention on the spiritual power, which worked in human lives in the past, the more can he hope to attract men to recognise its influence to-day.

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, 89.

5. The Christian man may draw much encouragement from finding that he can sympathise with the struggles and the spiritual experience of Israelites in the distant past. *These things are written for our learning, that by patience and comfort of the scriptures we may have hope.* But the understanding will be closer, the sympathy more intimate, with those who have shared in the Christian faith, and have cherished the Christian hope. They have felt the attractive power of God's love to mankind, as it is fully manifested by our Lord Jesus Christ. Each Saint's Day as it comes brings before us some aspect of the Divine Power which is associated with one particular name; and some there be which have no memorial. On All Saints' Day we may each commemorate the friends whose struggles and difficulties we have most fully understood, most intimately shared; and who have departed this life in God's faith and fear: by their good example they have left us encouragement; and the hope of rejoining them gives definite shape to the aspiration to be part-takers in God's heavenly kingdom.

6. There is indeed a danger of treating this intimate sympathy as not merely inclusive, but also as exclusive, and of limiting our sense of Christian fellowship to those whose experience is precisely similar to our own. It seems in looking

back, as if Wesley had not been sensitive to this danger, and had encouraged the formation of classes in which precisely similar experience was taken as a test of the reality of religion. The value of Christian fellowship should never be underrated: *they that feared the Lord spake often one to another*; but there is a danger lest we should take our own experience as the type of what Christian experience ought to be, and refuse to associate with any but the likeminded. The Church is not a mere association which some leader has gathered round himself; it has been built once for all on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone. There has been a wonderful variety of condition and temperament among all the members of the Holy Catholic Church, which is the organised body of Christian experience: it is well to be ready to learn from each and all who profess and call themselves Christians, and to try to enter into their inner lives. It is by the variety of the Christian lives that have been led, at sundry times and in divers places, that we may find help and encouragement for the varied circumstances of our lives, so that the body of Christ may perpetuate the different aspects of His character through all the ages. And here we see the real nature of the Church—not a body of likeminded men who will only have fellowship with men of

the same type—but a body founded by Christ, of which it is the function to form individual men and women more and more after His image, so that they may each attain to the closest relationship with their heavenly Father. The Church has been entrusted with the means of moulding the character of even the holiest men more nearly on the Divine model.

*Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ ;* and since, as we look back, we recognise how often wood, hay and stubble have been built upon it, we should take the more heed how we build ; since it is for us to find the material which is best fitted not only to edify our own personal life, but to raise a living Temple that shall endure from generation to generation.

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